NATION

Dense fog blinds Delhi; over 400 flights delayed

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Govt cuts gas allocation for LPG, diverts to city retailers

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

New day, same story: Kohli fails again

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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SC urges review of govt's delays in plea timelines

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Supreme Court of India has urged government authorities, particularly the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), to reflect on persistent delays in filing appeals. Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, during a hearing of an NHAI plea, questioned why the government struggles to adhere to deadlines. "I think everyone is adhering to the time schedule in almost 95 per cent of the cases. Why should the government of India not be able to adhere to it? There is something wrong somewhere... Introspection is necessary," he remarked. The NHAI had challenged a ruling from the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) concerning an insolvency case but faced criticism for a 295-day delay in its appeal submission. CJI Khanna underscored the importance of timely action, prompting Solicitor General Tushar Mehta—representing the NHAI—to commit to addressing the delay with the authority's chairman. The case involved contentious terms in a resolution plan approved without NHAI's consent, which the authority argued compromised its interests. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Cong fields Alka Lamba from Kalkaji against CM Atishi

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Congress on Friday announced the candidature of Alka Lamba from the Kalkaji constituency where she will take on AAP leader and Chief Minister Atishi in the upcoming Assembly polls. The Congress on Friday released its third list of candidates -- which has just one name -- for the assembly polls due in February. According to the All-India Congress Committee, the Central Election Committee has approved Lamba's candidature from Kalkaji. Lamba, who is the All-India Mahila Congress chief, had won the Chandani Chowk seat in 2015 contesting as an Aam Aadmi Party candidate. She joined the Congress in September 2019. AAP's Atishi will take on Lamba from the Kalkaji seat. *—PTI*

SP in Manipur's Kangpokpi injured in mob attack

IMPHAL, 3 JAN

A mob attacked the office of the Superintendent of Police in Manipur's Kangpokpi district over the officer's alleged failure to remove central force from Saibol village bordering Imphal East district on Friday evening, officials said. Several people including SP Kangpokpi M Prabhakar, other police personnel and protesters were injured during the clash between security forces and attackers, they said. Kuki organisations have been protesting against the alleged baton charge on women by security forces on 31 December in Saibol village. Attackers threw stones and other projectiles towards the office to vent over the continued deployment of central forces particularly the BSF and the CRPF in the village. Vehicles of district police kept within the compound of the SP's office were also damaged in the attack.— *PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

India raps China over 2 new counties in Ladakh

India protests against China's Brahmaputra dam plan too

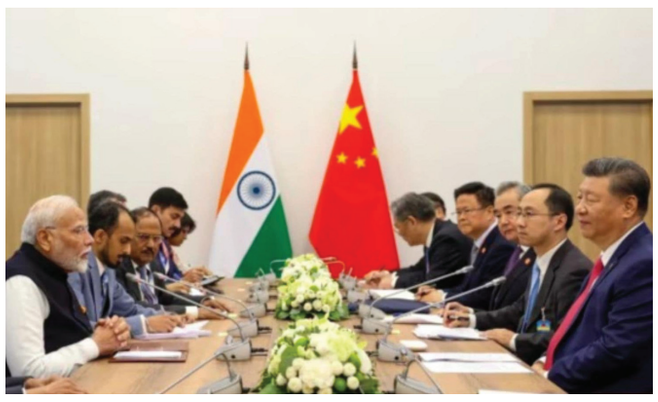
NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

India on Friday said it has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over establishment of two new counties in Hotan prefecture as parts of these regions fall in Indian Union territory of Ladakh.

In a strong reaction, New Delhi said creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's long-standing and consistent position regarding its sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's "illegal and forcible" occupation of the same.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has never accepted the "illegal" Chinese occupation of Indian territory in the area.

"We have seen the announcement pertaining to the establishment of two new counties in Hotan Prefecture of China. Parts of jurisdiction of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh," he said.



New Delhi said creation of new counties will not have a bearing on India's long-standing position regarding its sovereignty over the area ***PHOTO: PTI***

"We have never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation of Indian territory in this area," he said.

"Creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's long-standing and consistent position regarding our sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's illegal and forcible occupation of the same," Jaiswal added.

He further said: "We have lodged a solemn protest with the Chinese side through diplomatic channels." Meanwhile, following China's announcement of plans to construct a mega dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet, India has confirmed it will closely monitor the situation and take necessary measures to safeguard its interests. This marks India's first response to the proposed dam, which has raised concerns regarding potential negative impacts on the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated, "We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests." He reiterated India's long-standing position as a lower riparian state with established rights to the river's waters, expressing these concerns through both expert-level discussions and diplomatic channels.

India's response reflects ongoing tensions surrounding water management in the region, where the Brahmaputra is vital for the livelihoods and ecosystems in both Indian states and neighbouring countries. *—PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah, President Droupadi Murmu with Union Health Minister JP Nadda and NIMHANS Director Dr Prathima Murthy in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Murmu lauds NIMHANS for integrated medicine

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday hailed NIMHANS for its integrated medicine services as she considered it a model for all.

According to her, the application of Yoga and Ayurveda in the promotion of mental health and well-being is worth emulating.

"The integrative medicine services of NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) has been a model for all to examine the applications of Yoga and Ayurveda in the promotion of mental health and well-being, and in that treatment of psychiatric and neurological disorders," Murmu said during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Institute here.

- In the past, issues and concerns about mental health had not received enough attention in some societies, Murmu said, adding that in recent times, awareness about mental health has been rising

On the occasion, she inaugurated the Psychiatry Specialty Block, Central Laboratory Complex and Bhima Hostel at NIMHANS. The President also dedicated state-of-the-art diagnostic facilities – the advanced 3T MRI Scanner and DSA System to the nation.

She said different kinds of meditations are also useful in countering negative mental forces, and added that they are being integrated into the mental health care models. She underlined the importance of using traditional approaches that are beneficial for all.

Murmu said, "Our scriptures tell us that the mind is at the root of everything we perceive in the world."

In the past, issues and concerns about mental health had not received enough attention in some societies, the President said, adding that in recent times, awareness about mental health has been rising. *—PTI*

Mysuru man kills sister for feeding cucumber to baby

MYSURU, 3 JAN

Kollegal Town police have apprehended a man for allegedly murdering his sister and attacking his father and sister-in-law following a heated argument over a trivial matter concerning the feeding of cucumbers to his baby. The incident occurred at Idgah Mohalla in Kollegal town, situated in Chamarajanagar district.

According to the police, the accused, Syed Farman, 30, is alleged to have killed his sister, Iman Banu, 23. On Wednesday night, a dispute erupted between Iman Banu and Syed regarding the appropriateness of feeding cucumbers to his niece, who was unwell with a fever. After being reprimanded by his sister, Syed, in a fit of rage, fetched a sharp knife from the kitchen and fatally stabbed Iman Banu.

When his sister-in-law, Tasleema Taj, and their father, Syed Pasha, intervened to help, the accused also attacked them with the knife, resulting in a broken left hand for his father. Neighbours, coming to the victims' aid, managed to confine the accused and subsequently alerted the police. Syed Pasha and Tasleema Taj are currently receiving treatment at Chamarajanagar Institute of Medical Sciences Hospital. Following post-mortem examination, Iman Banu's body was returned to her relatives. An investigation is ongoing. *—Salar News*

LEADERSHIP CHANGE AHEAD?

With DKS abroad, Jarkiholi hosts CM & ministers for dinner

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi recently hosted a dinner for Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and several cabinet colleagues in Bengaluru, prompting speculation about the future of the Congress state president. Approximately 18 to 20 ministers and MLAs were in attendance on Thursday night as discussions were believed to have revolved around the party's leadership dynamics.

The dinner took place in the absence of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shiva Kumar, who is currently abroad, igniting rumours concerning potential changes in the leadership. Shiva Kumar has served as the Congress state president since March 2020, a period marked by significant successes for the party, including a victory in the recent state assembly elections, where they secured 134 out of 224 seats.

Former Chief Minister and BJP MP Jagadish Shettar weighed in on the situation, claiming it reflects deepening infighting within the Congress party. He alleged that Shivakumar is attempting to unseat the chief minister amid ongoing controversies, including the MUDA scam, while Siddaramaiah reportedly seeks to diminish Shiva Kumar's influence by considering a leadership change at the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC).

Satish Jarkiholi ***PHOTO: PTI***

However, State Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa dismissed these conjectures, clarifying that the gathering was merely a social dinner and devoid of political discussion. "We just had our dinner. We did not discuss any politics," he asserted.

Under Shiva Kumar's leadership, the Congress party has also seen an increase in its Lok Sabha representation from one seat in 2019 to nine in 2024, along with sweeping wins in recent assembly by-elections.

Despite the current tensions, the party high command regards Shivakumar as a critical asset in its strategy. *—PTI*

The survey sparked riots, resulting in four deaths and communal tension in Sambhal ***PHOTO: PTI***

SURVEY CLAIMS EVIDENCE OF TEMPLE FOUND IN SAMBHAL MOSQUE

SAMBHAL, 3 JAN

On 2 January, Court Commissioner Ramesh Raghav submitted a 40-45-page survey report on the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, to the Chandausi Court in a sealed envelope for security reasons. Civil Judge (Senior Division) Aditya Singh received the report, which reportedly includes evidence suggesting the mosque was built on a temple site.

The mosque contains two Banyan trees, typically associated with Hindu temples, and a well partly located inside the mosque premises. The survey, which included four and a half hours of videography and 1,200 photographs, uncovered over 50 floral patterns and structural alterations. Symbols indicative of Hindu temples and historical architecture were found, with plaster and paint concealing the original design. The survey sparked riots, resulting in four deaths and communal tension in Sambhal. 47 individuals were held and filed 11 cases related to the violence. The Shahi Jama Masjid, constructed in 1529 under Emperor Babur, is a significant Mughal-era monument. *—Agencies*

Actor Allu Arjun gets bail in stampede case

HYDERABAD, 3 JAN

A court has granted regular bail to renowned Telugu actor Allu Arjun, linked to a tragic incident that resulted in the death of a woman during a stampede at the premiere of his latest film, 'Pushpa-2'. The II Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge reserved the order following arguments from the actor's legal team and police representatives.

The court stipulated that Allu Arjun must provide two sureties, each representing a bond of Rs 50,000, in addition to his own. He is required to report to the investigating officer every Sunday between 10 am and 1 pm for up to two months or until the charge sheet is filed.

The court further instructed the actor to abstain from

Allu Arjun ***PHOTO: PTI***

obstructing the investigation or influencing witnesses in any way. Additionally, he must notify the court of any changes to his residence and may not leave the country without prior permission.

He was arrested on 13 December but was released from the next day after receiving temporary bail due to expire on 10 January. *—PTI*

'NOT ANOTHER PANDEMIC'

China plays down reports of flu outbreak

NEW DELHI/BEIJING 3 JAN

According to reports and social media posts China is grappling with an outbreak of the human metapneumovirus (HMPV) with the virus is spreading rapidly, with allegations of overwhelmed hospitals and crematories.

However, China on Friday played down reports saying that cases of the respiratory diseases which occur during the winter were less severe this year compared to last year. "Respiratory infections tend to peak during the winter season in the northern hemisphere," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told the media here in response to a question on the spread of influenza A and other respiratory diseases in China.

"I can assure you the Chinese government cares about the health of Chinese citizens and foreigners in China. It is safe to travel in China," she said.

She also referred to guidelines issued by the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration of China regarding the prevention and control of respiratory diseases in the winter.

Meanwhile, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is closely monitoring respiratory and seasonal influenza cases in the country, and is in touch with international agencies in the wake of the recent reports of an outbreak of the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in China, official sources said on Friday. "We will continue to monitor the situation closely and validate information and developments accordingly," a senior official said.

A video went viral on social media showing overcrowded hospitals in China amid reports of a flu outbreak

Director General of Health Services (DGHS) Dr Atul Goel said the Human Metapneumovirus is like any other respiratory virus which causes common cold, and it could cause flu-like symptoms in the young and the very old. *—PTI*

Madhugiri DYSP arrested over sexual misconduct

TUMAKURU, 3 JAN

Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) P Ramachandrappa of Madhugiri subdivision has been reportedly arrested after he was allegedly caught on camera in a compromising position with a woman in his office washroom on Friday. Earlier on Friday, Karnataka Police have suspended the DSP. The woman in the video, a native of Pavagada town in Tumakuru district, approached DSP in connection with a land dispute complaint, but the latter allegedly exploited his position to coerce her into an intimate act, according to sources. —*Salar News*

24-year-old man dies by suicide in Banaswadi

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

A 25-year-old man was found hanging at his house in Kanakadasa Layout in Banaswadi police station limits on Thursday night. The deceased as Satish, was an employee of a private firm in Bellandur. Preliminary probe hinted that Satish was in love with a girl for the last three years. However, the girl's family had objected to their relationship due to which Satish allegedly went into depression. The police said that Satish returned home around 8pm from his work and told his mother that he is tired and wanted to rest. The matter came to light around 10pm when his mother went to check on him as Satish did not join her for dinner. The police have registered an Unnatural Death Report (UDR) and are probing the matter —*Salar News*

(Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

Principal, warden suspended over student's death

MYSURU, 3 JAN

Chamarajanagar Deputy Commissioner Shilpa Nag on Friday suspended the in-charge principal and warden of the Morarji Desai Residential School in Yadavanahalli, Gundlupet taluk, for negligence following a student's death. Manveeth, 17, a second-year pre-university student, fell from the girls' hostel building stairs on 30 December. Hostel inmates found him unconscious and alerted the staff. He was rushed to a Mysuru private hospital but succumbed to injuries on 2 January. His last rites were performed at his native village, Mudigunda. The DC suspended principal P. Rajeshwari and warden Chinthan after an inspection team flagged lapses. She termed the incident "unfortunate" and assured stringent action post-investigation. A three-member committee led by the Assistant Commissioner has been set up to probe the incident. The team will also investigate claims that CCTV connections were intentionally disabled on the night of the incident. Findings from the report will determine further action against the staff —*Salar News*

IIA signs MoU with govt to promote astronomy

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

The Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Friday with the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) Department of the Karnataka Government to promote astronomy through 'Arivu Kendras' across the state. The RDPR operates 5,880 'Arivu Kendras' or gram panchayat libraries across the state, primarily located in rural areas and managed by dedicated library supervisors. "This will be achieved through the training and mentorship of supervisors, the creation of astronomy resources in Kannada, and collaboration in organising public activities around celestial events," the Ministry of Science and Technology said in a statement —*PTI*

BJP protests 15% KSRTC fare hike with roses

Transport Minister says hike is inevitable due to the need to revise salaries of staff

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers organised protests in Bengaluru on Friday over the 15-per cent fare hike on the Karnataka State Road Transportation Corporation (KSRTC) buses.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka slammed the Congress government over the hike and said that there was no money in Chief Minister Siddaramiah's pocket, which is why he resorted to the hike.

Ashoka said, "There has been a 15 per cent hike in the fare charges. This should not be done. There is no money in the pocket of Siddaramiah. That is why they are doing this.

He is the worst CM in the history of Karnataka. The KSRTC made profits when I was the transport minister, but when Siddaramiah came, it is making losses. Siddaramiah will apologize to people for the hike and again hike the fares."

"They have made bus travel free for women, but doubled it for men. Ramalinga Reddy blamed petrol and diesel price rise for the hike. Every two years, there is a rise in petrol prices. It was there during our government also, but we did not raise the bus fares. Karnataka will soon become Himachal Pradesh. A 15-per cent hike is too much. How will people afford it? Private taxis fares are now cheaper than KSRTC bus rides," he added.

"BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said, "This is the Khata Khat Loot model of the Congress party. Wherever Congress goes, loot, inflation and destruction of the economy follow. Today in Karnataka, water, petrol, diesel and milk prices have been increased. The bus fare is the latest." Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Friday justified 15 per cent increase in government bus fares across the board and hit out at the BJP for its protest against the hike.

Since there was a need to revise the salaries of transport staff, the bus fare revision was inevitable, he noted.

Addressing reporters here, the minister said all the four corporations, namely Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation, KKRTC Kalyana Road Transport Corporation, North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation and Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, had been demanding an in-crease in bus fares.

The minister said that way back in 2014, when he was holding the transport portfolio, bus fares were increased. When the diesel prices came down, the fares were slashed by two per cent, he added.

On 20 January, 2020, the then BJP government increased the bus fares by 12 per cent in KSRTC, KKRTC and NWKRTC. —*Agencies*

Opposition leader in Assembly R Ashoka and Opposition leader in Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy give roses to KSRTC male commuters during their protest in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

IF YOU TOUCH ME, YOU WILL REGRET IT: ASHOKA TO COPS

PHOTO: SALAR

A heated confrontation erupted on Friday between Leader of the Opposition, R Ashoka, and the police during a statewide protest organised by BJP against the government's 15 per cent hike in bus ticket prices.The incident unfolded at KSRTC bus station in Majestic, Bengaluru.The altercation began when BJP workers, led by Ashoka, entered the bus station premises as part of their demonstration. Police officers stationed at the venue requested the protesters to avoid entering the premises, citing preventive restrictions. In response, Ashoka engaged in a argument with the officers, accusing them of overstepping their authority.Videos circulating captured Ashoka shouting at a police officer and pushing him. "What? Will you beat me up? I'm the Leader of the Opposition. I warn you, this government will not last forever. If you touch me, I will see you. I have noted your name. I will make you remember it throughout your life," Ashoka was heard saying.He accused the police of brutality and warned them against any "atrocities.""Don't dare touch me. We are not here to protest; we are here to distribute roses to passengers," Ashoka claimed —*Salar News*

Kolar observes bandh over Shah's remarks on Ambedkar

KOLAR, 3 JAN

Kolar town observed a total bandh on Friday in protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Ambedkar.

The call for the bandh was given by the Congress party and Dalit organisations in Kolar. Barring minor incidents of forced closures of some business establishments and a few instances of vehicles being stopped, the bandh remained largely peaceful. Demonstrators took to the streets, urging shopkeepers not to open their shops and closing the main gate of the KSRTC bus depot.

Resorting to violence, they burned tyres at various locations. The agitators also forced some buses at the bus stand to return to the depot and forced post office employees to vacate the premises. One private school on Tekal Road in PC Extension, despite having declared a holiday, was found conducting classes.

A group of leaders, led by KPCC SC/ST Cell Convenor K Jayadeva, protested outside the functioning school. The car carrying MLC Inchara Govindaraju was briefly stopped on Tekal Road before police intervened to allow the vehicle to proceed. —*Salar News*

CRIME BEAT

Woman jumps from auto to escape drunk driver

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

A woman jumped from a moving autorickshaw to save herself from the drunk driver on Thursday night in Bengaluru, her husband said.

According to the survivor's husband, she booked an autorickshaw from Horamavu to Thanisandra on ride-hailing application 'Namma Yatri'.

"Namma Yatri Auto Issue! My wife booked a auto from Horamavu to Thanisandra, Bangalore, but the driver was drunk and took her towards the wrong location near Hebbal. Despite repeatedly asking him to stop, he didn't listen, forcing her to jump out of the moving auto," the husband posted on 'X' on Friday.

He complained that Namma Yatri has no customer care number to contact in the event of emergency.

"The biggest shortcoming of 'Namma Yatri' service is that there is no customer support. It asks us to "wait for 24 hours." How is it possible to wait 24 hours in an emergency? How is the safety of the woman?" he asked the Bengaluru police.

Meanwhile, responding to the complaint, ride hailing platform Namma Yatri said, "Hi Azhar, we're sorry to hear about the inconvenience caused to your wife, and we hope she's doing fine now. Please DM us the ride details, and we'll make sure to look into this promptly." —*PTI*

GIRL MISSING, TEACHER ACCUSED OF KIDNAPPING

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

A 16-year-old girl has been missing for over ten days after attending her tuition class, leading to fears that she may have been abducted by her teacher.

The student, originally from Kanakapura, lived with her family in JP Nagar. According to police, she was last seen on 23 November when she left for her regular tuition session. Alarmed parents discovered at the tuition centre that the teacher, Abhishek, had taken her out but could not reach him as he had left his mobile phone at home.

The family lodged a formal complaint at the JP Nagar police station, accusing Abhishek of abduction. —*PTI*

SC junks Cong MLA's plea over 'vague' allegations

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea filed by Karnataka Congress MLA **TD Rajegowda** against a BJP leader's plea making "vague allegations" against him.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said there was no reason to entertain Rajegowda's plea as he could raise grievances before the Karnataka High Court, when the evidence in the election petition was produced.

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for Rajegowda, said BJP's D N Jeevaraja had levelled some "vague allegations" in the election petition filed in the high court such as the use of black money without any evidence.

"Initially, we were also concerned about the vague allegations but the law provides for evidence to be produced during the proceedings," the bench said.

Jeevaraja moved the high court challenging Rajegowda's election to the Sringeri assembly seat in Chikmagalur district during the 2023 polls.

PHOTO: PTI

In a similar plea moved by Rajegowda in 2024, the top court allowed him to raise objections to the averment made before the high court at an appropriate stage

In a similar plea moved by Rajegowda in 2024, the top court allowed him to raise objections to the averment made before the high court at an appropriate stage.

The bench told Divan its earlier order on 27 September, 2024, took care of Rajegowda's concern and court would be contradicting its own order if it now entertained his plea and passed directions. —*PTI*

Woman falls from Anjanandri Hill while taking selfie

GANGAVATI, 3 JAN

A woman sustained serious injuries on Thursday evening when she fell from a height of 50 feet while taking a selfie on Anjanandri Hill in Gangavati taluk of Koppal district.

The victim, a resident of Raichur, was rescued after a two-hour mission.

Raichur Superintendent of Police Ram Arasidi said the woman was shifted to Raichur hospital after initial treatment at Gangavati Government Hospital, as she continued to be unconscious and in a critical condition. Anjanandri Hill has a Hanuman temple situated at a height of 525 feet. Hundreds of people visit this temple every day, and despite warnings, many of them climb onto the edges of huge boulders to take selfies on their mobile phones. She was hit two or three boulders before falling onto the rocky surface. Members of the temple committee and a rescue squad rescued her. —*Salar News*

IAS officer Atheeq lauds Manmohan as a 'visionary leader with humility'

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Senior IAS officer LK Atheeq, Additional Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, reflected on his experiences working with former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh at an event titled Legacy of Dr. Manmohan Singh: The Present and Future of India, held at Gandhi Bhavan in Bengaluru on Friday.

Sharing anecdotes from his tenure at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) between 2007 and 2012, Atheeq lauded Singh as a visionary leader and a paragon of humility. " Singh's leadership was marked by intellectual rigor, dignity, and evidence-based policy-making. He demanded meticulous preparation and respect for institutional processes, refusing to bypass ministerial autonomy even when expedient," Atheeq noted.

Swaraj India head Yogendra Yadav (3rd from left) and Additional Chief Secretary to CM, LK Atheeq (right) at Gandhi Bhavan on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Political activist and leader of Swaraj India, Professor Yogendra Yadav reflecting on his personal encounters with the late leader, shared poignant memories that highlighted the simplicity, humility, and unwavering integrity of Singh. —*Salar News*

MURMU IN BENGALURU

Prez urges families to help women speak up about health issues

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

President Droupadi Murmu urged people on Friday to encourage women in their households to openly discuss their health-related issues.

Many times, women in a family do not receive timely diagnosis and treatment for their health issues. This may be due to traditional mindsets where addressing their health concerns is not a priority for the family, including the women themselves. Such delays, especially in cases of cancer, can be critical, said Murmu, delivering the keynote speech after inaugurating KLE Cancer Hospital in Belagavi.

She also emphasised that society, as a whole, needs to take women's health more seriously and actively contribute to their care, ensuring they receive timely and appropriate treatment.

Murmu highlighted a global study identifying cancer as a leading cause of death worldwide.

President Droupadi Murmu with CM Siddaramaiah and NIMHANS Director Dr Prathima Murthy in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED SAD**

In 2022, there were an estimated 20 million new cancer cases and 9.7 million deaths globally. In India, the incidence of cancer is approximately 100 cases for every one lakh people, she said.

She mentioned that, according to a study by the Indian Council of Medical Research, the incidence of cancer in India is expected to increase by about 13 per cent in 2025 compared to 2020.

The setting up of a state-of-the-art cancer hospital in Belagavi is a significant step toward providing specialised cancer treatment and palliative care to the people, Murmu said.

Speaking on the occasion, Union Health Minister JP Nadda congratulated NIMHANS for becoming the first NABH-accredited hospital among all Institutes of National Importance and for ranking among the top 200 hospitals in the world. Nadda inaugurated the new campus of the School of Advanced Studies, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (S-VYASA), deemed to be a university, in Bengaluru on Friday. —*PTI*

VVIP movement in City leads to traffic chaos

VVIP movement in the City on Friday caused extensive traffic restrictions to facilitate the smooth passage of the convoy, leaving thousands stranded on the stretch between Dairy Circle and Lakkasandra as the police barricaded the road. President Droupadi Murmu, along with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Union Health Minister JP Nadda, and Minister for Medical Education Sharanprakash Patil, attended the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) at its convention centre on Friday. To ensure the convoy's security, traffic police temporarily blocked vehicular movement along Hosur Road, particularly between Dairy Circle and the Lakkasandra signal. Kumara, a resident of Bommanahalli traveling to Cunningham Road, described his ordeal: "The traffic was thrown out of gear on the stretch. It took me two hours to cover 20 kilometers, which I normally cover in an hour. VIP convoys always disrupt traffic, and its high time they start using helicopters to avoid inconveniencing the public. Authorities should also consider scheduling such movements during non-peak hours." —*Salar News*

3 naxals killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh

GARIABAND, 3 JAN

As many as three Naxals were killed in the exchange of fire with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district on Friday, police said. As per the Gariaband Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Jitendra Chandrakar, the encounter is still underway. Further details are awaited.
In December last year, two CoBRA commandos of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were injured in the exchange of fire with Naxals as they were securing a forward base established in the forest area of Sukma district in Chhattisgarh. In a separate episode, two naxals were killed in an encounter with security forces. *—PTI*

'Colonial mindset dismisses Sanatan texts as regressive'

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar expressed concern over the misguided reactions to the terms "Sanatan" and "Hindu" in India. Speaking at the International Congress of Vedanta at JNU, he described those who respond without understanding the profound meanings of these concepts as "misguided souls" operating within a "dangerous ecosystem." He lamented the irony of such reactions in a country rich in spirituality, noting that while global disciplines embrace Vedanta, some dismiss it as "regressive." Dhankhar attributed this dismissal to a perverted colonial mindset that undermines India's intellectual heritage. He warned that such intolerance threatens democratic values and social harmony. He called for a restoration of these essential democratic principles, lamenting the degradation of debate in India's legislative chambers. *—PTI*

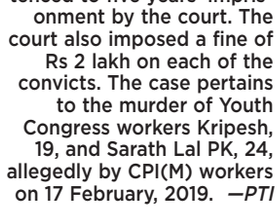


PHOTO: X

Periya twin murder: 10 get life imprisonment

KOCHI, 3 JAN

A CBI court here on Friday sentenced 10 people to life imprisonment, while four others, including a former CPI(M) MLA, received five years in prison for the murder of two Youth Congress workers at Periya in Kasaragod district five years ago. The court which convicted 14 accused on Saturday gave 10 of them life imprisonment under two counts of murder and criminal conspiracy. They will serve the sentences concurrently. Meanwhile, former MLA and CPI(M) district leader K V Kunhiraman, Kanhangad block panchayat president K Manikandan, Velutholi Raghavan, and A V Bhaskaran, were sentenced to five years' imprisonment by the court. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 2 lakh on each of the convicts. The case pertains to the murder of Youth Congress workers Kripesh, 19, and Sarath Lal PK, 24, allegedly by CPI(M) workers on 17 February, 2019. *—PTI*

Formula race case: Telangana ACB summons KTR

HYDERABAD, 3 JAN

Telangana Police Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Friday issued notice to former minister and BRS leader KT Rama Rao to appear before it on January 6 in connection with a case linked to alleged payment irregularities during the Formula-E race supposed to be held here in February 2023. Telangana ACB last month registered a case against Rao, also known as KTR over alleged payments, some of it in foreign currency without approvals, to conduct the race during the previous regime. Telangana High Court gave protection against arrest to Rao, until the order on a petition seeking to quash the FIR registered against him, is pronounced. *—PTI*

Modi & Kejri lock horns over 'Sheeshmahal' and 'AAPda'

Ahead of Delhi polls, Kejri says BJP has no CM candidate

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday slammed AAP as an "aapda"(disaster) for Delhi, saying this "aapda" had taken the national capital in its grip in the past 10 years. Modi also said he could also have built a "sheesh mahal" for himself but his dream was to ensure homes for everyone
Addressing people after launching a slew of infrastructure projects here, including in housing and education sectors, he said the situation in Delhi would worsen if AAP's reign continued.
In retaliation, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said, the BJP is faced with disaster ("aapda" in Hindi) in Delhi as it has no chief ministerial face, narrative or issue for the upcoming Assembly polls in the capital.
He added, BJP-led Centre has not done any development work in Delhi or else, Modi would not have had to spend 39 minutes of his 43-minute speech cursing the people of the capital and the government they elected with the largest mandate. "The talk of Sheeshmahal does not behove a person who has built a Rs 2,700-crore house for himself, travels in a Rs 8,400-crore airplane and wears a Rs 10-lakh suit," Kejriwal said, reiterating the opposition's charges against Modi.
In his attack, Modi also said, on the one hand, the Centre is making a lot of efforts; on the other, the Union Territory government stands for brazen lies, Modi said, accusing the AAP government of committing corruption in a host of sectors ranging from school education to fighting pollution and the liquor trade.
With assembly elections set to be held in the city next month, the prime minister said Delhi had launched a war on this "aapda " and decided to get rid of it.
"This year will usher in a new politics of nation-building and people's welfare. Therefore, 'aapda' has to be removed and the BJP brought in," he said.
After Modi likened AAP to 'aapda' for Delhi, BJP doubled down on the Arvind Kejriwal-led party, saying it has become the "biggest burden and liability" on the people of Delhi. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

PM lays foundation for Savarkar college amid Oppn's flak

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday virtually laid the foundation stones for two new Delhi University campuses and a college named after BJP ideologue Veer Savarkar.
The project, with an investment of over Rs 600 crore, aims to boost educational opportunities and modernise facilities.
The foundation-laying ceremony was held at Ashok Vihar where the prime minister also launched a slew of other infra projects for the national capital.
The East Campus, spanning 15.25 acres, is being developed at an estimated cost of Rs 373 crore. It will offer LLB, LLM and an integrated five-year LLB programme, alongside other multidisciplinary courses. The West Campus, being built at Rs 107 crore, will be a new academic block in the first phase. Covering 19,434.28 square metres, it will have 42 classrooms, two moot courts, a digital library, conference rooms, seminar halls and separate common rooms for boys and girls.
In addition to the campuses, Modi laid the foundation stone for Veer Savarkar College at Roshanpura, Najafgarh, just a five-minute walk from the West Campus. *—PTI*

Security forces during a search operation in Manipur **PHOTO: PTI**

Economic blockade enforced in Manipur's Kuki-Zo areas

CHURACHANDPUR, 3 JAN

Tribal body Kuki-Zo Council on Friday enforced an economic blockade in areas inhibited by the tribe in Manipur to protest against alleged action by security forces on women protesters in Saibol village of Kangpokpi district on 31 December.
Another organisation, Committee on Tribal Unity, also observed a 24-hour shutdown in the district to protest against the alleged baton charge on women.
The Kuki-Zo Council said the economic blockade to protest against "disregard for tribal rights and dignity", started at 2 January midnight, would continue till 2am on Saturday.
Vehicular movement and transportation of essential commodities passing through the Kuki-Zo inhabited areas have been disrupted, the organisation said.
The tribal body's chairman Henlienthang Thanglet said in Churachandpur that they would intensify the protest unless the women injured in the alleged baton charge by security forces are not compensated.
The women were injured in a clash with security forces in Kangpokpi district on Tuesday, after the mob tried to "disrupt" the deployment of a combined team of Army, BSF and CRPF, the police had posted on X.
Meanwhile, police on Friday said they arrested Mayengbam Momocha Meitei, a 42-year-old member of proscribed outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group), from Bijoypur Mathak Leikai area of Kakching district on Thursday.
The militant outfit has been found involved in extortion and placing of grenades at the residences of several individuals, the officer said. *—PTI*

CM: Oppn seeks unrest in state

IMPHAL, 3 JAN

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Friday took a jibe at the Opposition and said those indulging in politics over his apology to the people over the 20-month ethnic conflict want to spread unrest in the state while his government's priority is to restore peace.
"Those who are indulging in politics over my statement are seeking unrest. The opposition has no ideology. What I said was an expression of sadness and grief. My apology was to those who have been suffering and have lost their loved ones. I am saying sorry to the innocent people." *—PTI*

Govt unveils draft data rules with no penal clause

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The government has released the long-awaited draft of Digital Personal Data Protection Rules that do not mention any penal action for violations.
The draft rules, which have been published for public consultations, will be taken into consideration for making the final rule after 18 February.
"Draft of rules proposed to be made by the central government in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-sections (1) and (2) of section 40 of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (22 of 2023), on or after the date of coming into force of the Act, are hereby published for the information of all persons likely to be affected thereby," the draft notification said.
The draft rules have laid out provisions related to consent processing of individuals, data processing bodies and the functioning of authorities under the Digital Data Protection Act, 2023.
"...notice is hereby given that the said draft rules shall be taken into consideration after 18th February, 2025," the notification said.
The draft rules have not mentioned penalties that were approved under the DPDP Act, 2023.
Act has the provision to impose a penalty of up to Rs 250 crore on data fiduciaries -- entities for determining the purpose and means of processing of personal data. *—PTI*

It takes two to Tango: Pak's foreign minister on India ties

ISLAMABAD, 3 JAN

PHOTO: ANI

- Rejecting claims of diplomatic isolation, Dar noted improvements in country's relations with regional neighbours

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister **Ishaq Dar** has stressed that normalising relations with India requires mutual willingness from both nations. Speaking to journalists at the Foreign Office on Thursday, Dar highlighted the diplomatic efforts undertaken since the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government took office last year, stating, "It takes two to tango."
In addition, Dar announced plans for an upcoming visit to Bangladesh next month, aiming to strengthen economic and trade cooperation following the recent political changes there. He described Bangladesh as "like a lost brother", referencing an invitation he received from Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Muhamad Yunus, during a recent meeting in Cairo.
Rejecting claims of Pakistan's diplomatic isolation, Dar noted improvements in the country's international relations through engagement with regional neighbours. On Afghanistan, he acknowledged Pakistan's desire to bolster ties but admitted that terrorism continues to pose significant challenges.
Dar also shared news of former Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood's appointment as Secretary General of the D-8 Developing Eight Forum, starting 1 January, 2026. Moreover, he announced the launch of the Chashma 5 (C-5) nuclear power project in collaboration with China, marking significant milestone in nuclear sector. *—PTI*

IN MEMORY OF MANMOHAN

Cong party leader Sonia Gandhi, with late prime minister Manmohan Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur, daughter Upinder Singh and Cong President Mallikarjun Kharge during a prayer meet in Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

India trashes WaPo's claim of anti-Muizzu plot

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

PHOTO: X

India on Friday strongly trashed two recent reports published by the Washington Post -- one linking New Delhi to a failed plot to impeach Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and another on Indian agents allegedly attempting to eliminate certain terror elements in Pakistan.
Dismissing the reports, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson **Randhir Jaiswal** said the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a "compulsive hostility" towards India. In its report on the Maldives, the Post, citing a document titled "Democratic Renewal Initiative", claimed that opposition politicians proposed bribing 40 members of Parliament, including those from Muizzu's own party, to vote to impeach him.
Meanwhile, India and the Maldives have finalised a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border trade with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserting that New Delhi has always stood by the island nation.
Jaishankar made the remarks at a meeting with his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Khaleel in Delhi.
Khaleel arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit to explore ways to bolster bilateral ties in several key areas including maritime security, trade and investment.
"I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border transaction has been signed," Jaishankar said.
"We have increased our engagement in various sectors and I do want to say that India has always stood by the Maldives. You are a very concrete expression of our neighbourhood first policy," he added. *—PTI*

TN sexual assault: BJP women protest, detained

CHENNAI, 3 JAN

Several leaders of the Tamil Nadu BJP Mahila Morcha were detained or placed under 'house arrest' on Friday by police as they attempted to organise a rally from Madurai to Chennai, demanding justice for a student sexually assaulted on the Anna University campus.
Among those detained were party leader Khushbu Sundar, TN Mahila Morcha president Umarathi Rajan, BJP MLA Dr C Saraswathi, and numerous women members in Chennai. Both Khushbu and Umarathi condemned the police's actions, asserting they were preventing a peaceful demonstration for the victim.
BJP national organising general secretary BL Santhosh criticised the ruling DMK via social media, stating, "This is the situation in Tamil Nadu under the draconian @arivalayam—so-called saviours of the Constitution &

BJP leader Khushbu Sundar **PHOTO: PTI**

Democracy."
In Madurai, numerous BJP women staged a protest, with one cadre dressed as Kannagi—an emblematic figure from the Tamil epic Silapathikaram—demanding justice for the 19-year-old victim. BJP state president K Annamalai expressed his support, stating that the BJP would continue to advocate for the people of Tamil Nadu. *—PTI*

BPSC EXAM ROW

Pappu Yadav's supporters block trains

PATNA, 3 JAN

MP Pappu Yadav joins the protest of students demanding the cancellation of BPSC exam, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Protests intensified across Bihar on Friday as supporters of independent MP Rajesh Ranjan, popularly known as Pappu Yadav, disrupted rail and vehicular movement to demand the cancellation of the Bihar Public Service Commission's (BPSC) recent exam. Demonstrators gathered at Sachiwalay Halt Railway Station, halting the Buxar-Fatuha passenger train for 20 minutes, while road blockades were reported in Patna, Purnea, and Araria.
The unrest follows allegations of a question paper leak during the 70th Combined Competitive Examination conducted on December 13, which over five lakh candidates had sat. Although the BPSC denied the allegations and ordered a fresh test for over 10,000 candidates from the Bapu Pariksha Parisar centre, protesters are insisting that new exams should be held for all participants to ensure fairness.
Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor has been on a hunger strike since Thursday, calling for the cancellation of the exam and urging accountability for alleged corrupt practices within the commission. The administration has labelled Kishor's protest at Gandhi Maidan as "illegal," leading to an FIR being filed against him and his supporters.
Yadav, while dismissing Kishor's protest as insincere, expressed resolve to continue the fight alongside his supporters, inspired by recent farmer protests. Meanwhile, clashes occurred when police prevented leftist student organisations from marching towards the Chief Minister's residence. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

5-year-old girl raped by minor boy in UP

MAHARAJGANJ, 3 JAN

A 5-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a 13-year-old boy residing in her neighbourhood in Uttar Pradesh's Maharajganj, police said on Friday. The incident occurred on Thursday evening in a village under the jurisdiction of Brijmanganj police station. The accused has been apprehended, said Atish Kumar Singh, Additional Superintendent of Police of Maharajganj. The girl was playing outside her house when the minor boy, who lives nearby, took her to his place and allegedly raped her, Singh said. —*PTI*

Palghar woman dies of heart attack during delivery

PALGHAR, 3 JAN

A 31-year-old woman died during delivery at a hospital in Maharashtra's tribal-dominated Palghar district, an official said on Friday. Kunta Vaibhav Padvale of Galtare village in Vikramgad taluka was rushed to a local hospital on Tuesday night after she went into labour. The nine-month-pregnant woman was then referred to the government-run Patangshah Cottage Hospital in Jawhar. However, she died during delivery, the official said. Medical Superintendent Bharat Mahale of the Jawhar hospital said that the tribal woman was alright but suffered a heart attack during delivery and died. The doctors tried to save the baby but could not, he said. The body has been sent for post-mortem, he added. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Dubai flight lands in Kerala due to technical glitch

KOZHIKODE, 3 JAN

An Air India Express flight from Dubai made a precautionary landing at Karipur Airport near here on Friday after its pilot suspected a failure in the hydraulic system, airport sources said. Flight IX344, bound for Karipur, landed at around 8.30 am, they said. A full emergency was declared at the airport. However, the aircraft, carrying 182 people onboard, including six crew members, made a "safe landing," sources said. The emergency was subsequently withdrawn, they added. —*PTI*

BSF recovers China-made drone in Amritsar

AMRITSAR, 3 JAN

Troops of the Border Security Force (BSF) recovered a Pakistani drone from a farming field adjacent to the Village Dhanoe Khurd in Amritsar district, officials said on Friday. According to the Public Relations Officer, Punjab Frontier, BSF, the troops deployed on duty on the Amritsar border observed the movement of a drone during the late evening hours on Thursday. Immediately, a counter-drone drill was carried out and a thorough search of the area was conducted. Subsequently, the troops recovered 1 China-made DJI Mavic 3 Classic drone at about 8:25 pm on Thursday from a farming field adjacent to the Village Dhanoe Khurd in Amritsar district. According to BSF, several terrorists operating along the range of Pakistan are believed to be active in Jammu and Kashmir, making the need for steadfast vigilance even more critical. —*ANI*

Dense fog blinds Delhi; over 400 flights delayed

Delhi's AQ was in 'very poor' category at 351

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

More than 400 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport on Friday morning as visibility dropped to zero in some areas due to dense fog.

A thick blanket of fog engulfed the national capital in the morning, with the weather department predicting cloudy skies for much of the day. Delhi's minimum temperature was recorded at 7 degrees Celsius, the weather office said.

An official said over 100 flights have been delayed at the Delhi airport due to bad weather conditions but there are no diversions so far.

"While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information. Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a post on X at 6.35 am.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the IGI Airport experienced very dense fog with visibility recorded at 0 metres. It said all runways are operating under CAT-III, which allows aircraft to operate in low visibility conditions.

Meanwhile, dense fog blanketed Punjab and Haryana on Friday while the minimum temperature in the region hovered close to normal limits, meteorological department officials said.

The weather office has predicted very dense fog for Friday, with the maximum temperature expected to settle around 17 degrees Celsius.

Delhi's air quality was in the "very poor" category, with an AQI reading of 351 at 9 am. The humidity was recorded at 100 per cent at 8.30 am. —*PTI*

A Delhi Metro Rail Corporation employee inspects the track amid morning fog, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Dense fog engulfs parts of Kashmir, flight ops hit

SRINAGAR, 3 JAN

Dense fog engulfed large parts of Kashmir, affecting flight operations at Srinagar airport, as visibility fell to about 300 metres, officials said on Friday.

They said the thick layer of fog that engulfed Kashmir hit air traffic to and from the valley. Several flights were delayed while one was diverted as the visibility fell to about 300 metres.

However, operations resumed around noon after visibility improved at the airport. The morning's first flight landed in Srinagar at 11:48 am, the officials said.

On Saturday, a moderate to strong western disturbance is likely to affect Jammu and Kashmir and light to moderate snow at most places. —*PTI*

2002 murder case: SC seeks Rahim's reply on CBI appeal

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine the CBI's appeal against the acquittal of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and four others in the 2002 murder of Ranjit Singh, a former manager of the sect.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on 28 May, 2024, acquitted Singh and others in the case, observing the probe was "tainted and sketchy".

Media trials must not make objective evaluations of the evidence on record, the high court held further.

PHOTO: X

Sirsa-based Singh, who is serving a 20-year jail term for allegedly raping two of his disciples, is currently lodged in Sunaria Jail in Rohtak, Haryana.

On Friday, a bench comprising Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar issued notices to the five acquitted persons including Singh.

The murder was allegedly orchestrated by Singh, who suspected the deceased of being behind the circulation of an anonymous letter accusing him of sexually exploiting his women followers.

Those acquitted include Avtar Singh, Krishan Lal, Jasbir Singh, and Sabdil Singh whereas another accused Inder Sain, died during the pendency of the trial in 2020. —*PTI*

SC slams ED for 'high-handedness' on ex MLA's arrest

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Supreme Court has observed ED's "high-handedness" and "inhuman conduct" during an almost 15-hour long interrogation of former Haryana Congress MLA Surender Panwar and upheld an order saying his arrest was illegal.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih said it was an "inhuman conduct" on part of ED officers as the case was not related to some terror activity but of an alleged illegal sand mining.

"This is not the way to treat people in such a case. You have virtually forced a person to make a statement," it said.

The High Court's findings, it said, were only for deciding whether Panwar's arrest was illegal.

The money-laundering case stems from several FIRs registered by the Haryana Police for probing alleged illegal mining of boulders, gravel and sand that took place in the past in Yamunanagar and nearby districts despite a ban imposed by the NGT. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Minor drives car into procession in Jaipur, 4 injured

JAIPUR, 3 JAN

An SUV rammed into a religious procession, injuring four people here in Jaipur, and people angered by the incident vandalised the vehicle, police said on Friday.

The driver, a minor, was detained by police after the incident near Panchvati Circle at the Rajapark area where a Nagar Kirtan was being held by members of the Sikh community on Thursday night, they said.

According to police, the car had a MLA sticker pasted on the windshield, which is being verified. Six challans have been issued for overspeeding.

Police said the driver allegedly did not stop the car even after hitting people. About 100 metres ahead, the crowd stopped the car. Four boys got down and started running, but people caught the driver. —*PTI*

Medical seats can't be vacant: SC to Centre

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Seats in medical courses cannot remain vacant, the Supreme Court on Friday said and asked the Centre to hold a meeting with the relevant stakeholders, including the states, and consider the recommendations of a committee appointed over the issue.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and KV Viswanathan was hearing the matter. The Centre had then proposed to appoint a committee, consisting of all the stakeholders including representatives of states and private medical colleges, under the chairmanship of director general of health services to resolve the issue.

On Friday, the Centre's counsel said the committee comprising the stakeholders was constituted and it had given its recommendations on the issue. —*PTI*

Shirt removing row shouldn't divide Hindus: SNDP

T'PURAM, 3 JAN

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam general secretary Vellappally Nateshan on Friday said the row over the custom of male devotees removing shirts before entering temples should not affect unity of Hindus.

"There are many sections among the Hindus following various customs and practices. Such issues should not create division among them," he told reporters.

The issue was sparked by the statement of Sivagiri Mutt president Swami Satchidananda that the temples should give up the custom of not allowing male devotees wearing shirts into temples.

The Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had welcomed the Swami's stand and said such practices could be avoided in accordance with the changing times.

This drew sharp reaction

PHOTO: X

from the NSS general secretary G Sukumaran Nair, who said the government should not interfere with the customs and practices in temples.

"All Hindus have the freedom to enter temples without disrupting the practices at the respective places of worship," he had said.

Meanwhile, Kerala Yogakshema Sabha president Akkeeramon Kalidasan Bhattathiripad welcomed the NSS stand and said the customs and practices in temples should be decided by the tantris and others associated with them. —*PTI*

CHARLES DE GAULLE

French carrier to visit Goa & Kochi today

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

French Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle and its entire carrier strike group will visit Goa and Kochi from Saturday in what is being seen as a powerful demonstration of growing India-France strategic ties.

A carrier battle group or carrier strike group (CSG) is a mega naval fleet comprising an aircraft carrier, accompanied by a large number of destroyers, frigates and other ships.

At present, the French CSG is deployed in the Indian Ocean where it is conducting joint training sessions with its regional partners and allies, including India.

India has been France's foremost strategic partner since 1998, a French readout said, announcing the CSG's visit to the country.

Deployed in the Indian Ocean as part of Mission CLEMENCEAU 25, the French carrier strike group, comprising the aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle, its embarked air fleet and escort vessels (frigates and supply ships), will be making stopovers in Goa and Kochi from 4 January, the French embassy said.

The aim of this forum is to increase collective effectiveness in tackling a range of maritime issues PHOTO: ANI

Maritime cooperation between India and France has witnessed a major expansion in the last few years.

India also plays host for numerous operational stopovers made by French Navy vessels, accounting for 16 port calls since 2022, it noted.

The aim of this forum is to increase collective effectiveness in tackling a range of maritime issues. —*PTI*

AMID BANDH IN MP

Two men set themselves afire during the ongoing protest PHOTO: ANI

Union Carbide waste protest: 2 self-immolate

DHAR, 3 JAN

Two men were hospitalised after they set themselves afire on Friday amid a bandh call in Madhya Pradesh's Pithampur against the planned disposal of 337 tonnes of Union Carbide waste in the industrial town, an official said.

During one of the protests against the waste disposal in the town in the Dhar district, two persons poured some liquid on their bodies and set themselves on fire, according to eyewitnesses and a video shot at the scene.

Eyewitnesses said the two men, both aged around 40, were rushed to a hospital in Pithampur, about 30 km from Indore.

Shops and markets remained closed in the town amid the bandh call by Pithampur Bachao Samiti', which claims that the planned incineration of the Carbide waste in the area would harm the local people and environment.

On the intervening night of 2-3 December, 1984, methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal, killing at least 5,479 persons and leaving thousands with serious and long-lasting health issues in Bhopal.

The authorities have shifted 337 tonnes of waste from the Carbide factory to Pithampur for scientific disposal, though the move has triggered protests. The material from Bhopal reached an incineration unit in Pithampur on Thursday.

Amid the bandh call in Pithampur, which saw shops and markets remaining closed on Friday, a group of protesters blocked the road near Eicher Motors, but police prevailed over them and restored normal traffic with mild cane charge. —*PTI*

Mining op: Enforcement officials attacked in Nuh

GURUGRAM, 3 JAN

Two Haryana State Enforcement Bureau officers were allegedly injured in an attack by suspected mining mafia during inspection of an illegal mining operation in the Ghata Shamshabad village of Nuh district, police have said.

The accused also forcefully freed a tractor-trolley that was caught engaging in the illegal mining operation, they said.

An FIR was registered against three named accused and 22 unidentified people under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and other laws at Ferozpur Jhirka police station on the basis of a complaint filed by inspector Surajmal, SHO of the Haryana State Enforcement Bureau police station in Nuh.

Surajmal alleged that he, assistant sub-inspector Rakesh and driver Rafiq were on their way to Ferozpur Jhirka-Beewan Road to inspect an alleged illegal mining operation.

When they were close to the Ghata Shamshabad police naka, Surajmal said he tried to stop three tractor-trolleys laden with stones but the vehicles did not stop.

The Ferozpur Jhirka SHO arrived after some time with his mobile staff and a mining department team but the accused had escaped by then, according to the complaint. —*PTI*

Gujarat launches signboards for disabled on Braille Day

GURUGRAM, 3 JAN

The Gujarat government on World Braille Day emphasised its commitment to improving accessibility and inclusivity for specially-abled individuals and introduced braille signboards and features like ramps and wheelchairs in community toilets in Sultanpur village of Navsari district.

According to an official release, in a commendable initiative under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural) in Navsari district, Sultanpur village has set an inspiring example of inclusive development.

Community toilets in the village have been equipped with braille signboards for visually impaired users. Additional features include ramps for wheelchair access, grab handles for convenience, wide doors, and spacious interiors to ensure easy manoeuvrability.

PHOTO: X

World Braille Day, celebrated on 4 January, commemorates the birth anniversary of Louis Braille, the creator of the Braille script that empowers visually impaired people to read and write.

Sultanpur exemplifies a harmonious blend of cleanliness and self-reliance, embodying the vision of a Swachh and Atmanirbhar Bharat. — *ANI*

RARE BLACK LEOPARD SEEN

A rare melanistic leopard was spotted with its cub in the forest of Nayagarh district, Odisha, on Friday. The All Odisha Leopard Estimation-2024 has revealed that the state is home to such leopards in three forest divisions
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

B'desh faces allegations of human rights violation

Bangladesh's interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, spoke with US national security advisor Jake Sullivan last week amid growing international concern over reports of attacks on minority Hindus and their temples in the predominatly Muslim nation.

"Both leaders expressed their commitment to respecting and protecting the human rights of all people, regardless of religion," according to a White House statement.

Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh say they are being oppressed under the interim government that was installed after former prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to neighboring India in August 2024 following her ouster by a student-led uprising.

In one of the latest incidents, 17 houses belonging to the Christian Tripura community in southeastern Bangladesh's Bandarban district were reportedly set on fire on Christmas Eve. In response, Yunus' office condemned the attack, stating that such actions are "deplorable and unacceptable."

While security measures have been increased in Bandarban, the Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG), a human rights watchdog, has criticised Yunus for his failure to address the escalating violations of the rights of indigenous peoples and religious minorities.

RRAG identified serious violations, noting that more than 2,72,000 individuals — primarily political opponents — have been implicated in 1,598 criminal cases within the first 100 days of Yunus' administration. The organization reported that between September 19 and October 1, at least four Indigenous people were killed, and more than 75 others were injured.Nur Khan Liton, a human rights activist and member of the Commission of Inquiry into Enforced Disappearances, which was set up by the interim government, told DW that individuals implicated in criminal cases often face physical assault during their detention.

In response to the growing concerns, Bangladesh interim head Muhammed Yunus asserted that the reports of rights violations were widely exaggerated
PHOTO: PTI

In response to the growing concerns, Yunus asserted that the reports of rights violations were widely exaggerated, the AP news agency reported.

During a visit to Dhaka by Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri earlier this month, his Bangladeshi counterpart, Mohammad Jashim Uddin, said that Bangladesh's internal matters should not be subject to foreign interference. "We said people of all religions in Bangladesh freely practice their faiths. This is our internal affair. It is not expected [of other countries] to make comments on our internal affairs. We don't do it for other countries," the English-language daily quoted him as saying.

Several leaders of Hasina's Awami League (AL) have died in custody during the interim government's rule, sparking serious concern and controversy.

Within just 29 days, four AL leaders reportedly died of "heart attacks" while detained in Bogura prison, bringing the total number of AL members and activists who have died in police custody over the last four months to at least ten.

Family members of the leaders who died while incarcerated said that there were telltale signs of torture on some of the victims.

Former Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat said that the truth behind these deeply suspicious and unnatural deaths — whether homicides or not — would eventually come to light. Journalists aligned with the former Hasina government say they are facing increasing persecution under the Yunus administration, which has been accused of systematically suppressing independent media.

There have been more than 354 journalists harassed, 74 cases of violence reported, 113 criminal charges filed, and press credentials revoked for 167 journalists, according to the RRAG report.

The Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have urged the interim government to ensure fair trials and uphold procedural rights for reporters.

The interim government has previously vowed to restore democracy and uphold the free press. Masood Kamal, a senior news editor, said that journalists aligned with Hasina's government are losing their jobs.

"The supporters of the new regime are targeting journalists aligned with the previous administration by implicating them in various cases," he stated.

Lawyers have also encountered restrictions, with legal cases being initiated against those who speak out against the interim government.

Eminent lawyer and rights activist ZI Khan Panna, while speaking to DW, expressed grave concerns over the deteriorating legal environment. *—DW News*

SALAR سالار

Israel struggles to deter attacks from Houthis

The rockets from Gaza have mostly fallen silent. A ceasefire with Hezbollah militants in Lebanon has taken hold. But repeated fire from Yemen's Houthi rebels, a faraway foe, is proving a stubborn threat for Israel.

The Iran-backed Houthis are stepping up their missile attacks, sending hundreds of thousands of Israelis scrambling for shelter in the middle of the night, scaring away foreign airlines and keeping up what could be the last major front in the Middle East wars. "It's like musical chairs," said Yoni Yovel, 31, who left the northern Israeli city of Haifa late last year to avoid rocket fire from Hezbollah only to see his apartment in Tel Aviv's Jaffa neighborhood heavily damaged by a Houthi missile.

Israel has repeatedly bombarded ports, oil infrastructure and the airport in the Houthi-held capital Sanaa, some 2,000kms away. Israeli leaders have threatened to kill central Houthi figures and have tried to galvanise the world against the threat.

But the Houthis persist. In recent weeks, missiles and drones from Yemen have struck nearly every day, including early Friday morning, setting off air raid sirens in broad swaths of Israel. In some cases, the projectiles have penetrated Israel's sophisticated aerial defense system, most recently toppling an empty school and shattering the windows of apartments near an empty playground where one missile landed.

Because most missiles are intercepted and because the fire is usually a single missile at a time, the strikes have not caused major physical damage, although a few attacks have been fatal during the 15-month war in Gaza as the Houthis attack in solidarity with Hamas.

But the rocket fire is posing a threat to Israel's economy, keeping many foreign airlines away and preventing the country from jump-starting its hard-hit tourism industry.

Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have all but shuttered an Israeli port in the city of Eilat and have prompted ships destined for it to take a longer, more costly route around Africa to Israel's Mediterranean ports. "They are the only ones who are active now," said Danny Citrinowicz, a research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank. The Houthis, he said, "are a challenge of a different kind."

Throughout the war, the Houthis have also been firing missiles and drones at Israel, at first focusing on Eilat and eventually broadening attacks to include major population centers and the seaside metropolis of Tel Aviv. The launches have intensified in recent weeks. "There was thunder the other night and my daughter thought it was a missile. She woke up and started screaming," said Ibrahim Sosa, 53, whose home in Jaffa is near the site of a recent missile landing. The Israeli strikes have been deadly, with several people killed. Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari told The Associated Press that Israel's strikes focused on "military infrastructure which was used and directly contributed to Houthi terror activities, including to smuggle arms and finance their terror activities."

Hagari acknowledged the battle would be complex. And despite massive Israeli air power, the Houthis have continued their assaults. That stands in contrast to Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran — three other enemies Israel has largely neutralized over the past 15 months.

"Israel has many years of familiarity with those enemies. There is intelligence and there is the important element of a ground maneuver, and in Yemen we can't do that. The scale here is different," said Eyal Pinko, a former Israeli defense official and senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, an Israeli think tank.

Yemen does not border Israel, and Israel cannot easily stage a ground invasion as it has in Gaza and Lebanon to dismantle enemies' infrastructure. Israel has to orchestrate complex air missions to fly to Yemen, which are costly and limited in what they can achieve.

While the Houthis have been active as an insurgent force for years, Israel hasn't seen them as a priority or invested as much in gathering intelligence against them.

In Iran, Israel struck Hamas' top leader in an apartment in Tehran and knocked out many of its air defenses in an October strike that left parts of the capital exposed.

But the Houthis' hideouts, weapons and infrastructure are less known to Israel, making its counterstrikes somewhat less effective. Hagari recognized that Israel's intelligence in Yemen was "an issue" and said the military was working to improve.

Until then, some in Israel are steeling themselves for a war of attrition with the distant enemy. *—PTI*

Israeli leaders have threatened to kill central Houthi figures and have tried to galvanise the world against the threat
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

2025 to see advances in brain implants and agentic AI

Here is an account on what to look out for in the world of science and technology in the coming year.

AI

As the rapid commercialisation of AI tools continues, one big growth area in the coming year is likely to be what's known as agentic AI, where the AI begins to act independently across your devices. While these tools will be useful for computer-based tasks, more developments are also likely in robots that incorporate elements of AI to do practical tasks too, such as Tesla's Optimus robot. Although, it seems we're still a long way off having these in our homes.

Two scientists from Google Deepmind won the 2024 Nobel prize in chemistry for their development of AlphaFold2, an AI program which can accurately predict the shape of proteins. In 2025, expect more advances in the use of AI across all areas of science, from discovering drugs that could tackle antibiotic resistance, to designing new materials, and even helping to create early-warning systems for tsunamis and earthquakes.

Space missions

A couple of space launches planned for 2025 have been delayed, including Nasa's Artemis II mission to put astronauts back orbiting the Moon and India's Gaganyaan mission to put the first Indian crewed mission into space. But China's Tianwen-2 asteroid sample return mission is still expected to launch in May 2025.

Meanwhile, the first tranche of data from the European Space Agency's Euclid telescope should be published in March, and will hopefully begin to answer some big questions about the origins and whereabouts of dark energy and dark matter. On Mars, the Perseverance Rover will begin a long journey up the sides of the crater where it landed in 2021 to a new area on the Martian surface called Witch Hazel Hill, where scientists hope there may be rocks showing signs of life.

Brain-machine interfaces

In 2023, since a brain implant allowed a paralysed man to walk at a research institute in Switzerland, a flurry of research is continuing in this field. Elon Musk's Neuralink recently got approval for a clinical trial in Canada to test a brain implant that could allow paralysed people to control devices with their thoughts.

And watch out for more discussion on what these developments mean for neurorights and mental privacy. Unesco should adopt a recommendation on neurorights in November 2025, including the right to mental privacy and the ethics of neurotechnologies. With some experts warning about the way companies could monitor the brain waves of their employees through headsets, this could become a big topic of debate.

One big growth area in 2025 is likely to be agentic AI, where the AI begins to act independently across your devices
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Quantum computing

In late 2024, Google announced it had come out with a new quantum computing processor called Willow, reducing the rate of errors that quantum computers are prone to. While practical quantum computers are still some way a way, a lot money is being poured into quantum computing and 2025 has been designated the UN's international year of quantum science and technology, so watch this space for more developments.

Nuclear fusion

Another area attracting huge amounts of funding is nuclear fusion, with the goal to get to a working nuclear fusion reactor within the next ten years. One milestone for late 2025 could be the completion of the Sparc reactor being built by the company Commonwealth Fusion in Massachusetts, with the goal being to make more energy than it takes to power the reaction itself.

Courtesy,The Conversation

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Two dead, 18 injured in US plane crash

FULLERTON, 3 JAN

A small aircraft crashed through the roof of a commercial building in Fullerton, Southern California, on Thursday, resulting in two fatalities and 18 injuries, police have reported. The incident occurred at approximately 2.09pm, prompting immediate responses from firefighters and police, who fought a subsequent fire and evacuated nearby businesses. The affected building housed Michael Nicholas Designs, a furniture upholstery firm, and was filled with sewing machines and textiles. Casualties included ten individuals transported to hospital, while eight received treatment on-site. Initial reports indicated that the four-seat, single-engine plane went down about a minute after taking off near Fullerton Municipal Airport. Security footage captured the explosion and billowing smoke as the aircraft struck the building. Fullerton, home to around 140,000 people, is situated approximately 40 km southeast of Los Angeles. *—PTI*

Snow warnings issued in UK after Arctic blast

LONDON, 3 JAN

United Kingdom is under multiple snow and ice warnings as an Arctic blast brings widespread frost and snow. Yellow weather warnings cover most of England, Wales, and Scotland, with temperatures expected to plunge below freezing this weekend and up to 30 cm of snow forecast. England is also under an amber health alert, with the NHS urging people to avoid going out, especially during frosty mornings. Flooding has added to the chaos, with Greater Manchester declaring a major incident on 1 January. Homes were evacuated, train lines closed, and dangerous driving conditions reported. Floods Minister Emma Hardy assured communities of support, emphasizing efforts to accelerate flood defences. Bolton, Didsbury, and Stockport are among the worst-affected areas. *—Agencies*

Islamabad ATC grants bail to 250 PTI protesters

ISLAMABAD, 3 JAN

An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Islamabad approved bail for 250 individuals on Friday in relation to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) protests held on 26 November, according to a report by The Express Tribune. The bail approvals were granted in 13 cases registered across 10 police stations in the federal capital. The court instructed the individuals granted bail to provide surety bonds of Rs 5,000 each. Meanwhile, the court dismissed the bail pleas of 150 other suspects linked to the same protests. PTI, while demanding the release of Imran Khan, had started a protest on 24 November. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

South Korea sees 3.1% rise in birth rate

SEOUL, 3 JAN

The number of newborns in South Korea increased last year for the first time in nine years, according to government data released on Friday. This marks a significant shift for a country facing one of the world's lowest fertility rates, Yonhap News Agency reported. Resident registration data from the Ministry of the Interior revealed that 2,42,334 babies were born in 2024, representing a 3.1 per cent rise compared to the previous year. On 24 December, South Korea officially entered the category of a "super-aged" society, with individuals aged 65 and older making up one-fifth of its population, as per a government data *—ANI*

Israeli strikes kill 50 in Gaza; Bibi approves Qatar talks

Throughout the war, Israel has persistently targeted Gaza's police

DEIR AL-BALAH, 3 JAN

Israeli airstrikes have claimed the lives of at least 50 people, including several children, across the Gaza Strip, with strikes targeting Hamas security personnel and an area designated by Israel as a humanitarian zone. The bombings, which extended into Friday, have intensified amid ongoing negotiations for a ceasefire.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced the authorisation of a delegation from the Mossad intelligence agency and the military to continue negotiations in Qatar. Israeli media indicated that the delegation would set off on Friday, although no immediate response from Hamas has been made. US-led talks have faced repeated standstills amidst 15 months of conflict.

One early morning strike in the Muwasi humanitarian zone resulted in at least 10 fatalities, including three children and two senior Hamas police officers. Witness Ziyad Abu Jabal, displaced from Gaza City, lamented, "Everyone was taking shelter in their tents from the cold, and suddenly we found the world turning upside down."

An Israeli soldier covers his ears as an artillery gunner fires into the Gaza Strip from a position in southern Israel **PHOTO: PTI**

Another Israeli airstrike in Deir al-Balah killed at least eight individuals affiliated with local committees aiding in the delivery of humanitarian aid, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. Further bombings in southern Gaza claimed the lives of five policemen in Khan Younis, with Israeli officials asserting that the strikes were aimed at the head of Hamas's internal security force.

Throughout the war, Israel has persistently targeted Gaza's police, contributing to a state of chaos that hampers humanitarian efforts. While Hamas's police force once maintained public security in the territory, many officers have now vanished from the streets. At least 24 additional individuals, including children, were reported killed in strikes across central Gaza late Thursday and early Friday, as stated by Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.

The war was ignited by a Hamas-led assault on Israel on 7 October, which resulted in roughly 1,200 deaths, primarily among civilians. In retaliation, Israel's offensive has led to over 45,000 Palestinian deaths in Gaza, with humanitarian conditions deteriorating dramatically for approximately 90 per cent of the 2.3 million population. *—PTI*

NEW YEAR RAMPAGE

IS-inspired New Orleans attacker acted alone: Biden

WASHINGTON DC, 3 JAN

New Orleans attacker Shamsud-Din Jabbar acted alone even though there are indications that he had strong support for ISIS, US President Joe Biden has said.

At least 14 people were killed and 35 others were injured after Jabbar drove his pickup truck into a crowd on Bourbon Street early Wednesday.

The FBI is investigating the incident as an act of terrorism. Jabbar, 42, a former veteran, also died in a shootout with the local police. A resident of Houston, he drove to New Orleans.

"As of now, we have no information that anyone else is involved in the attack. They've established that the attacker was the same person who planted the explosives in those ice coolers in two nearby locations in the French Quarter just a few hours before he rammed into the crowd with his vehicle," Biden told reporters at the White House on Thursday. "They assess he had a remote detonator in his vehicle to set off those two ice chests," he said.

"The attacker posted videos just several hours before the attack indicating his strong support for ISIS. Federal law enforcement and the intelligence community are actively investigating any foreign or domestic contacts or connections that could possibly be relevant to the attack," said the president. *—PTI*

Biden blocks Nippon's $15B US Steel deal

US President Joe Biden has decided to block Nippon Steel's USD 14.9 billion takeover bid of US Steel. The decision on whether to let the deal proceed was referred to Biden on 23 December after the Committee on Foreign Investment (CFIUS)failed to reach a consensus. Biden had 15 days to approve or block the deal after the CFIUS evaluation reached his desk, which prompted Nippon Steel to extend the deadline. CFIUS was concerned that Nippon could cut the production capacity of US Steel.

—Agencies

Ahead of Trump's inauguration, debate on H1B visas intensifies

WASHINGTON DC, 3 JAN

Three weeks ahead of Trump's inauguration on 20 January, the debate on foreign guest workers visas for highly skilled professionals, the H-1B, has intensified which has literally created divisions in both the Democratic and the Republican parties.

Indians are the main beneficiaries of the H-1B visas, which bring in the best of the talent and brains from across the world. Highly skilled professionals from India walk away with the overwhelming number of H-1B visas – which is Congressional mandated 65, 0000 every year and another 20,000 for those who received higher education from the US.

President-elect Donald Trump, who will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on 20 January in front of the US Capitol, has come out in support of the H-1B, so has two of his close confidants, Tesla owner Elon Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, both of whom have been tasked to head the newly created Department of Government Efficiency.

PHOTO: X

"I've always felt we have to have the most competent people in our country. We need competent people, we need smart people coming into our country, we need a lot of people coming in. We're going to have jobs like we've never had before," Trump told reporters at a New Year's Eve party.

Meanwhile, US Senator Bernie Sanders said, the main function of the H-1B visa program is not to hire "the best and the brightest," but rather "to replace good-paying American jobs with low-wage indentured servants from abroad". *—PTI*

6 Jan riot: Video shows suspect planting bombs

The FBI is releasing more information about its pipe bomb investigation, including an estimate that the unidentified suspect is about 5 feet 7 inches tall. The bureau also is posting previously unreleased video of the suspect placing one of the bombs.

A host of basic questions remains unanswered four years later. For starters, investigators haven't determined if the suspect is a man or a woman. Nor have they established a clear link between the pipe bombs and the 6 January, 2021, riot at the Capitol by a mob of Donald Trump's supporters. The FBI "can't work on assumptions," said David Sundberg, assistant director in charge of the bureau's Washington field office. "Without being able to confirm the suspect's identity, it is very hard to definitively establish motive," Sundberg told The Associated Press.

Ukraine President Zelenskyy said it is not possible to end the war in one day, as US president-elect Donald Trump claimed **PHOTO: X**

Cybertruck blast: Accused's wife left before NY

WASHINGTON DC, 3 JAN

On New Year's Day, Matthew Livelsberger, a 37-year-old Army Special Forces soldier, detonated a Tesla Cybertruck outside the Trump International Hotel before taking his own life inside the vehicle.

Investigators are now considering whether his actions were fuelled by personal turmoil rather than political motives. According to police, his wife confronted him over alleged infidelity, leading to a heated argument that ended their relationship.

Six days later, he his wife and their infant daughter "He loved his family, but he was clearly struggling," a source familiar with the case revealed.

The officers initially thought of it the explosion as politically motivated but Livelsberger's history as a "Rambo-type patriot" and staunch supporter of Trump has complicated the theory.

Seven people suffered minor injuries when the Tesla truck exploded **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

The explosion of the truck, packed with firework mortars and camp fuel canisters, came hours after 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Bahar Jabbar rammed a truck into a crowd in New Orleans' famed French Quarter early on New Year's Day, killing at least 15 people before being shot to death by police.

Seven people suffered minor injuries when the Tesla truck exploded. *—Agencies*

Trump's strength can help end war: Zelenskyy

KYIV, 3 JAN

US President-elect Donald Trump is "strong and unpredictable," and those qualities can be a decisive factor in his policy approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

However, Zelenskyy said it won't be possible to end the almost three years of war in one day, as Trump claimed during his election campaign he could do.

"The hot' stage of the war can end quite quickly, if Trump is strong in his position," Zelensky said in a Ukrainian television interview late Thursday, referring to fighting on the battlefield.

"I believe (Trump) is strong and unpredictable. I would very much like President Trump's unpredictability to be directed primarily toward the Russian Federation," Zelenskyy said.

Trump, who takes office on 20 January, hasn't publicly fleshed out his policy on Ukraine but his previous comments have put a question mark over whether the United States will continue to be Ukraine's biggest — and most important — military backer.

Russia controls about one-fifth of Ukraine and last year capitalised on weaknesses in Ukraine's defences to slowly advance in eastern areas despite high losses of troops and equipment. The war's trajectory is not in Ukraine's favour. *—PTI*

IMPEACHED SOUTH KOREAN PREZ DEFIES ARREST WARRANT

Pro-Yoon demonstrators rallied outside, waving South Korean and American flags in support of the embattled leader **PHOTO: X**

SEOUL, 3 JAN

A tense standoff unfolded on Friday as South Korean investigators attempted to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol at his official residence. The confrontation, lasting nearly six hours, was marked by clashes between the anti-corruption agency's officers and Yoon's presidential security forces, which blocked their entry citing safety concerns.

Pro-Yoon demonstrators rallied outside, waving South Korean and American flags in support of the embattled leader. The National Police Agency is now investigating senior members of Yoon's security detail for allegedly obstructing official duties.

Yoon was impeached on December 14, facing allegations of rebellion following his controversial declaration of martial law. A Seoul court issued a warrant to detain him on Tuesday, complicating enforcement while he remains within the confines of his residence.

Legal complexities continue to hinder investigators, as they argue that locations tied to military secrets require the consent of the person in charge for searches. *—PTI*

'NOT A REPLACEMENT'

AI can't replace humans in war: China

BEIJING, 3 JAN

Investing heavily in modernisation, the Chinese military has cautioned its armed forces against banking heavily on artificial intelligence saying that AI should be a tool to guide but not a replacement for human decision-making in the battlefield because it lacks self-awareness capability.

"As AI evolves, it must remain a tool guided by human judgment, ensuring accountability, creativity, and strategic adaptability remain at the forefront of military decision-making" an article published in People's Liberation Army Daily, the official media of the Chinese military said on New Year's Eve.

"AI must work in tandem with human decision-makers to optimise command effectiveness, enhancing rather than replacing human agency," it said.

AI can be used to augment human capabilities – through data analysis, simulations or planning – but cannot replace the human factor.

China say AI must work in tandem with human decision-makers to optimise command effectiveness **PHOTO: X**

Human autonomy and creativity are indispensable on the battlefield, it said adding that while human commanders can respond to situations dynamically, and exploit enemy weaknesses AI operates within predefined algorithmic boundaries and its responses often lack originality, it said.

The Daily said PLA preferred a model where "humans plan and AI executes" in which the technology is used to carry out the strategies and tactics developed by commanders and keeps an element of human oversight.

The military prefers a structure where machines analyse data, provide insights and suggest potential actions. However, "final decisions rest with human commanders, safeguarding against errors stemming from AI's black-box nature", the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post report said.

- The article said another weakness of the technology is its inability to reflect on its own actions or take responsibility for its decisions, unlike human commanders who can refine their plans in response to the circumstances

The article said another weakness of the technology is its inability to reflect on its own actions or take responsibility for its decisions, unlike human commanders who can refine their plans in response to the circumstances.

Even advanced systems, such as autonomous missile defence, typically rely on human operators for final decisions to ensure accountability. *—PTI*

Gold prices almost flat at ₹79,700; Silver slips ₹230

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

Gold prices traded almost flat at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal closed at Rs 79,720 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver slipped Rs 230 to Rs 90,400 per kg on Friday. The white metal settled at Rs 90,630 per kg in the previous trading session. However, the price of gold with 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 130 to Rs 79,300 per 10 grams on Friday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery increased Rs 6 to trade at Rs 77,723 per 10 grams. Silver climbed Rs 517 or 0.58 per cent to Rs 89,690 per kg in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Globally, Comex gold futures rose USD 2.10 per ounce or 0.08 per cent to USD 2,671.10 per ounce. —*PTI*

Western Carriers India bags ₹139 cr order from Vedanta

KOLKATA, 3 JAN

Western Carriers India Ltd (WCIL), a Kolkata-based logistics firm, has secured a material handling order worth Rs 139 crore from Vedanta Ltd, the company said on Wednesday. The order entails an import, finished goods domestic and export material handling contract at Vedanta's Jharsuguda plant for a duration of four years, WCIL said in a statement. As of 31 March, 2024, WCIL reported sales of Rs 1,685 crore, a nearly 3 per cent increase from the previous year. The company's net profit stood at Rs 80.35 crore, translating to a 12-per cent on-year growth. In September, the company, founded in 1972, raised Rs 492 crore via its maiden IPO at a price of Rs 172 per share. At 3.16 pm, the stock was trading at Rs 122 per share on the NSE. —*PTI*

'Blinkit's 10-minute ambulance service must follow law'

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said quick-commerce companies like Blinkit, which is launching a 10-minute ambulance service, must make sure that they meet the law of the land. Blinkit on Thursday launched 10-minute ambulance service in select areas of Gurugram as a pilot project. Users will be able to see the option to call for an ambulance on the Blinkit app, according to a company statement. "As regard Blinkit doing ambulance services or medicines being delivered, my only submission would be that they have to make sure that they meet the law of the land and whatever are the legal should be properly taken care of. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Producer Vipul's Sunshine Pictures files IPO draft

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Film and television producer-director Vipul Shah-backed Sunshine Pictures Ltd has filed draft papers with the market regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). IPO comprises a total offer size of 83.75 lakh equity shares including a fresh issue of 50 lakh shares and an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of 33.75 lakh shares by promoters, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). Promoter Vipul Amrutlal Shah is proposing to sell 23.69 lakh shares, while Shefali Vipul Shah plans to offload 10.05 lakh shares. The company plans to use the proceeds from the fresh issue to meet its long-term working capital requirements, allocating up to Rs 94 crore to support future growth. —*PTI*

Govt cuts gas allocation for LPG, diverts to city retailers

City retailers face 40% supply cut, raising CNG prices by ₹2-3/kg

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The government has slashed allocation of natural gas used for LPG production, and diverted the low-priced fuel to city gas retailers like Indraprastha Gas Ltd and Adani-Total Gas Ltd to meet a part of their requirement for CNG/piped cooking gas supplies, according an official order.

The government had in October and November last year cut supplies of low-priced natural gas coming from old fields such as Mumbai High and Bassein fields in the Bay of Bengal, to city gas retailers by as much as 40 per cent in view of limited output.

This led to city gas retailers hiking CNG prices by Rs 2-3 per kg and threatening more increases as they replaced lost volumes with higher-priced input fuel.

The price hike made CNG less attractive when compared to alternate fuels like diesel. To resolve this, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in a 31 December order rejigged some allocations of gas produced from below ground and undersea.

The ministry ordered a cut in gas supplied to state-owned GAIL and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) for production of LPG and diverting those volumes to city gas entities.

GAIL and ONGC will have to use either higher-priced gas produced from new fields or rely on imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) to replace the lost volumes. The LPG they make is supplied to fuel retailers like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) for sale to households as domestic cooking gas LPG in cylinders.

The government subsidises domestic cooking gas LPG and so higher cost of production is likely to be borne by it.

The ministry also ordered pro-rata allocation of gas from new wells and earmarked ONGC's Ramnad field for the city gas sector, which will make available about 1.7-2 mmscmd of gas to city gas retailers, according to the order —*PTI*

The government had in October and November last year cut supplies of low-priced natural gas coming from old fields PHOTO: PTI

- The price hike made CNG less attractive when compared to alternate fuels . To resolve this, in a 31 December order rejigged some allocations of gas from below ground and undersea

SENSEX TUMBLES 720.60 PTS

Mkts tank nearly 1% on selloff in banking, IT stocks

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure to settle nearly 1 per cent lower on Friday as investors pared exposure to bank and IT stocks ahead of the earnings season starting next week.

A depreciating rupee against the US dollar further weighed on sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 720.60 points or 0.90 per cent to close at 79,223.11 despite a positive beginning. During the day, it slumped 833.98 points or 1.04 per cent to 79,109.73.

The NSE Nifty tanked 183.90 points or 0.76 per cent to 24,004.75.

From the Sensex pack, Zomato, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, ICICI Bank, Sun Pharma, Larsen & Toubro, HCL Tech and ITC were the major laggards.

On the other hand, Tata Motors, Nestle, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. Japanese markets were closed for the New Year holiday.

Markets in Europe were trading lower. US stocks were in the negative territory on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday after remaining net sellers for the past many days. They bought equities worth Rs 1,506.75 crore, according to exchange data. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

STRONG DOLLAR DEMAND

Rupee falls 4 paise to close at record low of 85.79

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

The rupee depreciated 4 paise to close at a record low of 85.79 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as strong dollar demand from importers and a muted trend in domestic equities weighed on investors' sentiments.

Forex traders said the dollar gained against most currencies during 2024 and continued to remain on a strong footing this year.

The US dollar index breached the crucial 109-mark. The uptrend in the American currency was underpinned by expectations of fewer rate cuts and a view that the US economy will continue to outperform its peers globally.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and sank to an intra-day low of 85.80, and its high of 85.73 against the American currency.

The local unit settled for the day at a record low of 85.79 (provisional), registering a fall of 4 paise over its previous close. Reports of RBI selling US dollars supported the rupee at lower levels, traders said. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 11 paise to close at a record low of 85.75 against the dollar.

Traders said the market will keep its focus on US President-elect Donald Trump's policies, which could boost growth but might also increase price pressures and this would keep the US Fed on hold for longer on interest rate cuts.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.33 per cent lower at 109.03. —*PTI*

Forex traders said the dollar gained against most currencies during 2024 and continued to remain on a strong footing this year PHOTO: PTI

'RBI may reduce policy rates by 50 basis points'

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to cut policy rates by 50 basis points (bps) in the first half of 2025, says a report by Jefferies.

This after the central bank eased its stance on liquidity and reduced the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) by 50 bps during the last MPC meeting.

The Jefferies report says, "After easing stance on liquidity & CRR by 50bps, RBI may review policy rates; we see 50bps rate cuts in 1H25".

The report highlighted that the RBI's shift from a "withdrawal" stance to a more "neutral" liquidity position, coupled with the CRR cut to the pre-COVID level of four per cent of the Net Demand and Time Liabilities (NDTL), has set the stage for a potential rate cut.

However, the report noted that these policy changes could temporarily impact Indian banks' Net Interest Margins (NIMs). A 10-bps decline in NIM could reduce earnings by 3–8 per cent, with the impact being more pronounced for Public Sector Banks (PSBs). —*PTI*

Extreme poverty reduced to minimal in India: SBI Research

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

SAs the poverty rates in the country declined below 5 per cent in 2024, a research study by State Bank of India (SBI) also highlighted that the extreme poverty in the country has reduced to minimal.It said "At an aggregate level, we believe poverty rates in India could now be in the range of 4-4.5 per cent with almost minimal existence of extreme poverty"

The report also highlighted significant improvements in rural and urban poverty levels over the years, supported by data from the government's Consumption Expenditure Survey. According to the survey, rural poverty is estimated at 4.86 per cent in FY24, a sharp decline from 7.2 per cent in FY23 and 25.7 per cent in FY12. Similarly, urban poverty has dropped to 4.09 per cent in FY24, compared to 4.6 per cent in FY23 and 13.7 per cent in FY12. The report attributed the decline in rural poverty to higher consumption growth among the bottom 5 per cent of the population, leading to a shift in the poverty line. In FY23, the poverty line fell within the 5-10 per cent decile, but by FY24, it had shifted to the 0-5 per cent decile, indicating better economic conditions for the poorest segments of the population. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

Senior TRAI officer arrested for bribery

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

CBI has arrested a senior TRAI officer for allegedly receiving a bribe of Rs 1 lakh from a cable operator in Himachal Pradesh to favour him in compliance matters, officials said on Friday.

The agency booked Narender Singh Rawat, a senior research officer of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), on allegations that he demanded the bribe from a licence holder of the Union information and broadcasting ministry for running cable services in Himachal Pradesh's Sirmaur, they said.

He also allegedly asked the operator to pay a bribe on behalf of other five licence-holder cable operators in the state for favour in assessing regulatory documents such as quarterly performance reports.

The purpose of the bribe was to not recommend cancellation of their licenses to the ministry, the agency said.

After preliminary verifications, the CBI laid a trap and caught Rawat red handed while accepting the bribe of Rs 1 lakh in his Delhi office from the complainant, the CBI said.

The agency conducted searches at residential and official premises of the accused in Greater Noida and New Delhi, it said. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

INDIAN BANKS TO SEE 12.5% CREDIT GROWTH: HSBC

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Credit growth of Indian banks are expected to witness a range-bound 12.5 per cent growth in the current financial year, HSBC Global Research said in a report, attaching a rider that slowdown in GDP growth remains a downside risk.

HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited, in the report dated 2 January, said it expects 2024–25 credit growth to remain range-bound.

Retail loan growth increased in November 2024, driven by unsecured personal loans, home loans and sustained growth in gold loans.

Non-food credit grew by 12.2 per cent year-on-year and 1.3 per cent month-on-month compared to 12 per cent year-on-year and 0.7 per cent month-on-month. —*PTI*

Telangana unveils new RE policy, to add 20GW

HYDERABAD, 3 JAN

Telangana aims to add 20,000 MW to its existing over 11,000 MW renewable energy (RE) generation and storage capacity by 2030, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said on Friday.

After unveiling the Telangana Clean and Green Energy Policy-2024, Bhatti said in order to achieve the target, the state would focus on Standalone Renewable Energy Projects, Innovative Solutions such as floating solar, Waste to Energy and Green Hydrogen.

"Telangana is targeting to achieve an additional 20,000 MW of renewable energy and storage capacity by 2030," he said.

The current renewable energy capacity, which stands at 11,399 MW, includes 7,889 MW of solar energy (excluding distributed renewable energy) and 2,518 MW of hydro energy.

Vikramarka said with various ongoing mega infra projects such as future city and phrma city, the state is expected to drive an exponential rise in peak electricity demand – from 15,623 MW in FY 24 to 24,215 MW by FY 30 and 31,809 MW by FY35.

It is essential that this demand is met with clean, reliable, affordable and sustainable energy solutions, he said. —*PTI*

Forex reserves drop by $4.11B to $640.27B

MUMBAI, 3 JAN

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion during the week ended 27 December, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped by USD 8.478 billion to USD 644.391 billion.

The reserves have been declining for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee.

The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 541 million to USD 66.268 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 12 million to USD 17.873 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was unchanged at USD 4.217 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. —*PTI*

PRIVACY GOES FOR A TOSS

Apple to pay $95M to settle 'snoopy Siri' case

CALIFORNIA, 3 JAN

Apple has agreed to pay USD 95M to settle a lawsuit accusing the company of deploying its virtual assistant Siri to eavesdrop on people using its iPhone and other devices.

The proposed settlement filed on Tuesday in an Oakland, California, federal court would resolve a five-year-old lawsuit alleging that Apple surreptitiously activated Siri to record conversations through iPhones and other devices equipped with the virtual assistant for more than a decade.

The alleged recordings occurred even when people did not seek to activate the virtual assistant with the trigger words, "Hey, Siri." Some of the recorded conversations were then shared with advertisers in an attempt to sell their products to consumers more likely to be interested in the goods and services, the lawsuit asserted.

The allegations contradicted Apple's long-running commitment to protect the privacy of its customers – a crusade that CEO Tim Cook has often framed as a fight to preserve "a fundamental human right".

Apple is not acknowledging any wrongdoing in the settlement, which still must be approved by US District Judge Jeffrey White. Lawyers in the case have proposed scheduling a 14 February court hearing in Oakland to review the terms.

If the settlement is approved, crores of consumers who owned iPhones and other Apple devices from 17 September, 2014, through the end of last year could file claims. Each consumer could receive up to USD 20 per Siri-equipped device covered by the settlement, although the payment could be reduced or increased, depending on the volume of claims. —*PTI*

Allegations contradicted Apple's long-running commitment to protect the privacy of its customers PHOTO: X

Karun breaks List A record for most runs unbeaten

VIZIANAGARAM, 3 JAN

Karun Nair on Friday rewrote the world record for most List A runs without being dismissed while guiding Vidarbha to an eight-wicket victory over Uttar Pradesh in a Group D match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here. Karun went past the record set by former New Zealand all-rounder James Franklin in 2010 — 527 runs. The right-hander was eventually dismissed for 112 as his tally got stopped at 542 runs, setting a new mark. It was Karun's fourth hundred, third on the trot, in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, helping Vidarbha overhaul UP's 307 for eight in 47.2 overs. The victory also enabled Vidarbha to position themselves comfortably as the top team in Group D with 20 points from five games ahead of second placed Tamil Nadu (14) and UP (14), who are on third. *—PTI*

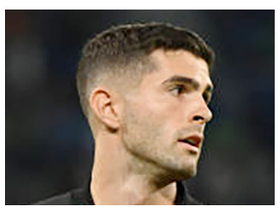

PHOTO:X

Pulisic to come back for AC Milan in Super Cup vs Juventus

RIYADH, 3 JAN

Christian Pulisic appears to be healthy again following injuries to his calf and ankle and could return for AC Milan against Juventus in the Italian Super Cup semi-finals on Friday. The United States international has been out since tearing a muscle in his right calf nearly a month ago. Then he had a minor ankle issue. Pulisic has been one of Milan's top players this season with five goals and four assists in Serie A. He has also scored three goals in the Champions League. The Super Cup match will mark the debut of new Milan coach Sergio Conceicao, who replaced the fired Paulo Fonseca on Monday. Conceicao's son, Francisco, is a winger for Juventus. Inter Milan beat Atalanta 2-0 on Thursday in the other semifinal. The final is scheduled for Monday. *—PTI*

Celtic's Engels hit by coin in 3-0 loss to Rangers

GLASGOW, 3 JAN

Celtic midfielder Arne Engels was struck in the face by a coin thrown from the stands late in a 3-0 loss to Rangers at Ibrox. Engels fell to the ground after being hit near his left eye as he went to take a corner kick. He received treatment and continued playing. There were no Celtic fans at the stadium because of a ticketing dispute regarding allocations to away supporters. "We're just lucky that it didn't hit him right in the eye," Celtic defender Alistair Johnston said. Despite beating their archrival, Rangers trail league leader Celtic by 11 points in the Scottish Premiership. Rangers issued a statement condemning the incident "in the strongest possible terms." The club said it will assist Police Scotland in an investigation. *—PTI*

Odisha FC meet defensively resolute FC Goa

BHUBANESWAR, 3 JAN

FC Goa and Odisha FC will look to build on their prolific recent form when they lock horns in their Indian Super League match here on Saturday. FC Goa are enjoying a strong campaign with a solid current unbeaten streak in away games (6), while Odisha FC are seeking their first-ever win against the Gaurs in ISL history. However, the home team enters this fixture in high spirits, having won thrice and drawn twice in their previous five matches. FC Goa better them in this aspect, since they have emerged victorious in four out of their last five ISL contests. The Gaurs are placed third in the standings with 22 points from 12 matches and the Juggernauts are positioned sixth with 20 points from 13 games. *—PTI*

New day, same story: Kohli fails again

India collapse to 185 against Australia on Day 1, 5th Test; captain Rohit opts to rest

SYDNEY, 3 JAN

Rohit Sharma "opted to rest" in the team's interest but the same old script unfolded on a new day for Indian batters as they surrendered meekly for a paltry 185 in the face of some hostile seam bowling from Australia on the opening day of the fifth and final Test here.

Virat Kohli (17 off 69 balls), whose form and technical weaknesses are also under the scanner, was for the seventh time dismissed in the corridor of uncertainty in the tour, a problem that seems incurable at the moment.

Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was unbeaten at 7 after hitting Bumrah for a first-ball four. The 19-year-old also had an animated exchange with the Indian star.

Bumrah opted to bat under overcast conditions and the ultra-defensive approach by Indian batters only compounded their problems with Scott Boland's (20-8-31-4) immaculate length and tremendous discipline leaving them in a disarray.

Rohit Sharma on Friday "opted to rest" himself from the fifth and final Test against Australia here after a string of underwhelming performances, putting a question mark on his future in longest format.

If Rohit's decision to "rest" was a forward thinking move, the persistence with Kohli is proving to be detrimental and the celebrated batter might just have one more Test innings left to save his place in the traditional format.

India's Virat Kohli, right, reacts after he was dismissed by Australia's Scott Boland during play on the first Day of the fifth cricket Test between India and Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground, in Sydney, Australia ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rohit became the first India skipper to opt out of a game on account of his own poor form, handing his deputy Jasprit Bumrah the leadership role. Bumrah had captained the side in the series-opener as well when Rohit took a short paternity break.

India wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant said he batted with restraint on the opening day of the fifth Test against Australia because character of the SCG pitch and the game situation did not allow him to be his customary aggressive self. *—PTI*

> **I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out'**
>
> -Ricky Ponting, Australian batting great

> **Facing Jasprit will be challenging on this track**
>
> -Beau Webster, Debutant all-rounder

Shastri: We've probably seen Rohit for last time in Test

SYDNEY, 3 JAN

Former India cricketers Sunil Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri feel that the Boxing Day Test might have been Rohit Sharma's final appearance in Test cricket, following his bold call to rest himself for the series finale that began here on Friday.

The 37-year-old chose to sit out with the series on the line, having scored only 31 runs in five innings across three Tests.

"I think it probably means that (if) India don't qualify for the WTC final, the Melbourne Test will be Rohit Sharma's last game," Gavaskar said during the lunch break on day one.

"The WTC cycle will start with the England series, and the selectors would likely want someone available for the 2027 final. Whether India gets there or not is another matter, but that's is what the selection committee is likely to do.

"We have probably seen Rohit Sharma for the last time in Test cricket," he added.

Shastri echoed the sentiment, predicting that Rohit would "pull the plug" on his Test career after the series.

"At the toss, Jasprit [Bumrah] mentioned it before I could ask," Shastri said during commentary.

"He said the captain opted to sit out and said the team would be stronger if Shubman Gill plays. *—PTI*

SCG sets new attendance record as 47,566 fans attend on Day 1

SYDNEY, 3 JAN

A record-breaking 47,566 spectators packed the stands on day one of the fifth India-Australia Test on Friday, marking it the highest-ever opening day attendance for a Test match between the two teams at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The Australian public continued to turn out in large numbers for the marquee Border-Gavaskar Trophy series. "The records keep on falling. Over 45,000 through the gates of the Sydney Cricket Ground on Day 1," Cricket Australia tweeted. This new mark comes just days after the all-time attendance record at Melbourne Cricket Ground was smashed earlier. *—PTI*

Maphaka makes debut, SA opts to bat first against Pak

CAPE TOWN, 3 JAN

Kwena Maphaka became the youngest South African to make a test debut as the Proteas won the toss and elected to bat in the second and final test against Pakistan on Friday.

The 18 years and 270 days old Maphaka broke Paul Adams' South Africa record of youngest test player, who played his first test against England in 1995 at the age of 18 years and 340 days.

South Africa made three changes after sealing its place in June's World Test Championship final with a dramatic two-wicket win in the first test at Centurion inside four days.

Australia, India and Sri Lanka all still in the race for the Lord's WTC final against South Africa in June. Australia could advance to face South Africa if it wins the fifth test against India in Sydney.

South African batsman Aiden Markram in action during the second test match between South Africa and Pakistan in Cape Town ***PHOTO: PTI***

Pakistan had an injury scare when opening batter Saim Ayub twisted his right ankle on the field as South Africa reached 72-3 at lunch. *—PTI*

India to announce Kho Kho WC 2025 squads on 8 Jan

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

Two teams each for men's and women's categories, named 'India A' and 'India B', will be announced on 8 January for the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup, scheduled to take place from 13 to 19 January in New Delhi.

The squads will consist of 15 players each, selected from an ongoing training camp featuring 60 athletes in both categories. Matches will be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium and the Noida Indoor Stadium. Sudhanshu Mittal, president of the Kho Kho Federation of India, revealed that the final teams and their captains for both India A and India B will be made public on 8 January.

The quarter-finals are set for 17 January, with the semi-finals on 18 January and the final scheduled for 19 January ***PHOTO: X***

He emphasised the need for strategic team selection, given the demanding nature of the week-long tournament, where teams will compete in multiple matches each day.

The tournament will feature a total of 24 nations, including the USA, England, Germany, Australia, and Brazil, competing in a league-cum-knockout format for both men's and women's teams. Notably, Indonesia will participate only with a women's team.

The quarter-finals are set for 17 January, with the semi-finals on 18 January and the final scheduled for 19 January. *—PTI*

UP Rudras defeat Soorma Hockey Club in HIL match

ROURKELA, 3 JAN

In a commanding performance, UP Rudras defeated Soorma Hockey Club 3-0 in a Hockey India League (HIL) 2024-25 match held at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium on Thursday.

The Rudras made their intentions clear from the outset, with Sudeep Chirmako scoring a rapid goal in the second minute. Although Soorma Hockey Club started to find their rhythm, earning several penalty corners, they were unable to convert their opportunities.

UP Rudras maintained their lead, and in the third quarter, Jobanpreet Singh doubled the advantage in the 38th minute, directing a well-placed pull-back from Chirmako into the net. As Soorma pressed for a goal, they struggled to break through the Rudras' solid defence.

In the final quarter, Soorma increased their possession but could not capitalise on their chances. Akashdeep Singh sealed the match for the Rudras with a stunning reverse tomahawk shot in the 58th minute.

Despite a late push from Soorma's captain Harmanpreet Singh, they were unable to find a consolation goal. *—ANI*

Inter dominates Atalanta in Super Cup SFs

RIYADH, 3 JAN

Defending Serie A champions Inter Milan showcased their dominance over current league leaders Atalanta with a convincing 2-0 victory in the semifinals of the Italian Super Cup. Denzel Dumfries emerged as the star of the match, netting both goals in the second half. Inter's victory marks their seventh consecutive win against Atalanta.

The match saw Juventus face AC Milan in the other semifinal on Friday, where Sergio Conceicao will make his debut as Milan's coach following the dismissal of Paulo Fonseca. The final of the four-team tournament is set to take place in Saudi Arabia on Monday, with Inter vying for their fourth consecutive Super Cup title.

Atalanta notably opted to bench key players Ademola Lookman, Charles De Ketelaere, and Ederson at the start of the match ***PHOTO: X***

Dumfries first struck with an impressive acrobatic overhead kick from close range before completing Inter's scoring with a powerful long-range shot during a counterattack. Although Inter threatened several times in the first half, they were thwarted repeatedly by Atalanta's goalkeeper, Marco Carnesecchi.

Atalanta notably opted to bench key players Ademola Lookman, Charles De Ketelaere, and Ederson at the start of the match. The trio later entered the fray, with Ederson having a potential goal disallowed for offside after a VAR check.

Despite the triumph, Inter suffered an injury concern as striker Marcus Thuram limped off with an apparent left thigh injury at half-time. This season, Atalanta and Napoli currently lead the league by a point over Inter, who has a game in hand. *—PTI*

'ADHERE TO OLYMPIC CHARTER'

Sports ministry warns IOA on IGU election

NEW DELHI, 3 JAN

The Sports Ministry has expressed concern over the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) recognising the Indian Golf Union (IGU) elections won by the faction led by Harish Kumar Shetty. The Ministry indicated that such actions foster "avoidable duplication and confusion," potentially jeopardising their legal standing.

On 30 December, the IOA formally recognised the Shetty-led IGU, declaring the opposing faction, led by Brijinder Singh, as void. In a letter signed by IOA president PT Usha, the National Olympic Committee stated that it had "reviewed the facts" and "examined the procedural adherence" before acknowledging the Shetty faction.

In a letter dated 2 January, the Sports Ministry advised the IOA to comply with the Olympic Charter, re-evaluate the situation, and take necessary actions to ensure the effective functioning of the governing body. The Ministry's letter highlighted uncertainty regarding whether the IOA's Executive Committee or its Affiliation Committee had thoroughly examined the matter in accordance with the IGU's constitution and existing sports regulations.

On 30 December, the IOA formally recognised the Shetty-led IGU, declaring the opposing faction, led by Brijinder Singh, as void ***PHOTO: X***

Two Annual General Meetings (AGMs) for IGU elections took place on 15 December, with Singh re-elected at one venue while Shetty secured victory at the Olympic Bhawan. Despite a legal challenge against the Returning Officer's appointment, the Delhi High Court permitted the elections to proceed, allowing subsequent legal disputes regarding the results.

Additionally, the Ministry referenced a recent letter reiterating its support for Brijinder Singh's presidency. The situation has further escalated as the International Golf Federation has updated its records to reflect the newly elected officials, a fact the Ministry noted appears to have been overlooked amid the ongoing confusion. *—PTI*

PGA: Aaron lies tied 10th as Bhatia, Theegala trail

KAPALUA, 3 JAN

PHOTO:X

Indian Americans Akshay Bhatia and Sahith Theegala had subdued starts at The Sentry but Indo-British Aaron Rai made a strong impression with a solid five-under 68, ending the first round tied for 10th at the PGA Tour season-opener.

Bhatia posted a two-under 71, placing him tied-30th, while Theegala struggled with a triple bogey and finished with a three-over 76, leaving him tied-56th at the Par-73 Plantation Course.

USA's Tom Hoge opened the 2025 PGA TOUR season with a nine-under 64 to take a one-stroke lead over compatriot Will Zalatoris and Japan's Hideki Matsuyama.

Hoge's round included 10 birdies, equaling a career-high from the third round of the 2023 PLAYERS Championship (62). Hoge was No. 29 in the FedExCup standings last season, advancing to the TOUR Championship for the second time (2022).

He is in search of his second PGA TOUR victory in his 287th start (2022 AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am).

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, who was Asia's top performer on the PGA TOUR in 2024, fired a superb eight-under 65, to lie one off the lead at The Sentry. *—PTI*